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## On Weakness

Gianfranco Mantegna

The “weak” force—together with gravity, electromagnetism and the “strong” force—is the most recently discovered of the four hypothetical forces of nature. This force conveys the weak nuclear force between neighboring nuclear particles, determining the stability of atomic nuclei and the reaction that fuels the sun and stars. Indeed, the race to measure its very heavy and extremely short-lived particles, called Z, is going on right now.

Conversely, a weak force has also emerged among the most advanced developments of philosophical thought of the last decade in Italy: the “weak” thought, or *pensiero debole*, as proposed by Gianni Vattimo, Pier Aldo Rovatti, Maurizio Ferraris and Umberto Eco, among others. Facing the failure of the “strong” logocentric discourse, we need a “weak ontology,” necessary to deal “with the interconnected issues of a no longer tenable model of classical, i.e., metaphysical, logocentric reason.”<sup>1</sup> Under this perspective, Vattimo sees Benjamin, Adorno, Sartre, Bloch and Lukacs not as thinkers of dialectic, but rather of its dissolution.

*Arte Debole* is directly inspired by the *pensiero debole*. In this respect it enjoys formidable philosophical underpinnings, upholding unequivocally the continual interaction between thought and painting, or more generally the process of making art in this century. Since the mid-80s a loose group of artists has been showing, performing and doing installations with various titles, but always centered on the theme of *Arte Debole*. Most recently, Gian Carlo Pagliasso, Renato Alpegiani, Luigi Antinucci and Renato Ghiazza distinguished themselves, appearing in several national and international exhibitions.

Having witnessed the collapse of logos, we still face the question of *la verità dell'arte* in our society. We juggle limitations and strategies, seeking a totality by definition impossible to obtain. Art must challenge us with continual renewal, with built-in random genetic codes that allow for unusual mutations. "The temporal contraction of memory persists on the synchronic background of the system of signifiers. This aspect is present in the work as a 'residual' character and indicates its meaning from within a continual process of covering up and revelation."<sup>2</sup>

The "residual" (*resto*) seems crucial in *Arte Debole*: "residual" as leftover, humble detritus, trace of memories, funerary residue. Describing the attributes of weak thought in the essay *Dialettica, differenza, pensiero debole*, Vattimo mentions *pietas* as an evocation of mortality, finiteness and ephemerality: "*The transcendental, which makes possible any experience of the world is the ephemeral (caducità)*."<sup>3</sup>

But the "weak" approach gives us hope: it is an "open" system. Today, the barren rigidity of the hardware is done away with through the creative fields of software. Weak thought allows for antientropic expansion, being "a thought of enlightened *reasonableness*, rather than triumphant *rationality*."<sup>4</sup> Strength is limiting: weakness wins because it is supple, and like in fractal geometry its articulation is infinite.

1. Peter Carravetta, "Repositioning Interpretive Discourse: From 'Crisis of Reason' to 'Weak Thought'," in *Differentia* 2 (1988), p. 107.

2. Renato Ghiazza, "Epigraphs," in Exhibition Catalogue, Carlo Bottello Arte gallery, Turin, 1988.

3. Gianni Vattimo, *Il Pensiero Debole*, Feltrinelli, 1987, p. 23 (emphasis by author). [In English: *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 10 (Spring 1985). Ed.]

4. Umberto Eco, *ibid.*, p. 78 (emphasis by the author).

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GIAN CARLO PAGLIASSO: "Monumento per la derealizzazione del Padre" (1989), p. 161.

"Monumento" (1988), p. 162.

"Il segreto & il suo fine" (1988), p. 163.

RENATO GHIAZZA: "Dislocamento e abitazione" (1989), p. 164.

"Giardino" (1988), p. 165.

"Il segno del riscatto" (1989), p. 166.

LUIGI ANTINUCCI: "Monumento al mattone" (1989), p. 167.

"Per una ristrutturazione dell'estetica" (detail; 1988), p. 168.

RENATO ALPEGIANI: "Superamento come limite" (1989), p. 169.

"Inessenziale" (1988), p. 170.

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